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AUTHOR Uxer, John E.
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ABSTRACT

Improved strategies for sharing resources are absolutely essential to the survival of small schools. Although not all, or even a major portion, of school programs should be provided by a cooperative delivery system, a discerning superintendent and board will mobilize every resource available to them in conducting their educational programs. Numerous models have been employed in providing cooperative services. School districts usually participate in shared programs because such programs are mandated by law or state board policy; because of economy, cost effectiveness, quality, convenience; or because services are available only on a shared basis (most frequently the case for small schools). Texas' Region XIX Education Service Center (46% of Texas school districts enroll fewer than 500 students; 83% of the districts are located beyond normal metropolitan services) provides shared services in the areas of instructional media, cooperative purchasing, special education, and staff training. Other areas to consider for shared services include bus driver training, innovative program pilots, professional library, printing, data processing, etc. The scope of programs and services available to all school districts by prudent utilization of cooperative strategies is limited only by the ingenuity and energy of education leaders in aggressively pursing such strategies. (BRR)

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SHARING RESOURCES IN THE SMALL SCHOOL

By

John E. Uxer

November 5, 1982

Paper presented at the Southwestern Rural Education Conference (Las Cruces, N.M., November 5-6, 1982).

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Sharing Resources in the Small School

John E. Uxer

I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you this morning about sharing resources in the small school. In my opinion improved strategies for sharing resources are absolutely essential to the survival of small schools. Continuing escalation of costs for goods and services; ever-increasing tax burdens; and the cry for better educated students demand that we discover innovative solutions to the provision of quality education at affordable costs. Although small schools may very well rely upon resource sharing for survival, I submit to you that a substantial amount of what I present here today would apply to larger schools as well.

The sharing of resources is not a new concept by any means. We all participate, personally, in resource sharing (painful that it may be) every time we pay taxes. We each pay taxes on property, personal income, goods, and gasoline. Taxes thus collected are consolidated to pay the salary of the sheriff, pave the roads, light the streets and build the school buildings. None of us need individually, nor could we afford, a sheriff, a road, or a street light—yet all

of us agree that, along with other individuals, we need these commodities. That's sharing resources.

School districts' sharing of resources parallels this example in many respects. Most small schools do not need nor can they afford a full-time psychiatrist or psychologist, for example, but there are times when the services of such persons are needed. There is some research which holds that a minimum student enrollment base of 30,000 to 40,000 is necessary to economically provide the basic educational support services. My own observations and informal research indicates that many services may be efficiently provided on a cooperative basis to a much larger enrollment base. The Texas Legislature verified that a minimum student base is required to economically provide necessary services when they authorized ESCs in 1965 and 1967. TEC Section 11.32 specifies that each Region shall serve at least 50,000 students unless the State Board makes exceptions for sparse areas.

What implications does this research have for the states represented here? I'll let you apply it to your own state but I'll summarize the application for Texas.

Even if we generously interpret the research and assume that those districts with fewer than ten thousand students would be most benefited by sharing resources, 1017 of 1071, or 95% of the public school districts in Texas would be included. Even more dramatic is the fact that 982 or 92% of the districts have fewer than 5000 students—and 904, or 84% have fewer than 3000. Additionally 776 or 72% of the districts in Texas enroll fewer than 1500 students while 486 districts, or 46%, enroll fewer than 500. Further recognition that a minimum student base is required to afford required services is contained in State Board Policies. State Board Policy requires districts with fewer than 3000 students to join in cooperatives with other districts for special education.

Geography also impacts availability of services. Almost one half the districts in Texas, or 466, are classified as Rural. Another 423 are classified as non-metropolitan which means that 83% of the districts are located beyond the normal metropolitan services.

I would not want to imply that all, or even a major portion, of school programs should be provided by a cooperative delivery system.

I believe the basic school administration and program operation can be best accomplished through the local control of an elected school board and administered by a selected superintendent and staff. I do believe, however, that a discerning superintendent and board will mobilize every resource available to them in conducting their educational programs.

Neither do I contend that all cooperative activity should be managed by or obtained through Intermediate Education Agencies—although this is, and should be, a major responsibility of such agencies. School administrators should be knowledgeable of and have ready access to cooperative services regardless of who oversees the program. Numerous models have been employed in providing cooperative services. As an example, many cooperative activities are managed by one school district and shared with other districts; services are provided by MHMR units, Special State schools or, in Texas, Regional Schools for the Deaf. Every state has a directory or directories, I am sure, which catalogs many services available on a shared basis.

School districts usually participate in shared programs because such programs are mandated by law or State Board Policy, or because of economy, cost effectiveness, quality, convenience, or because services are available only on a shared basis. The latter is most frequently the case for small schools. Regardless of the motivation, a well-organized, professionally operated program of shared services results in a step toward equalizing educational opportunity for students.

It is impractical within the timeframe of today's program to try to detail every kind of service which is appropriate for a shared-type delivery. Therefore, I would like to focus upon the effort in Texas to utilize the intermediate educational agency (Education Service Center) as the State's primary vehicle for delivering such services. I'll be using some examples in Region XIX ESC because I am most familiar with Region XIX, but must say that the other 19 Regions could relate similar information about their programs—although the primary emphasis might differ because of school district needs and desires.

In Texas, the education service center is regarded as both an extension of the local school districts and State Education Agency.

As a matter of fact, the State Board and Commissionerconsider the Centers as the service arm of the Texas Education Agency.

During the 1981-82 school year funds for Region XIX ESC operations were derived from four sources: State—34%; Federal flow-through—22%; direct Federal—9%; and Local contracts—35%. It is anticipated that in ensuing years the federal portion will decrease and the state portion will increase. Of a total budget of $8,600,000 only 8% went for what we call center operations; that is—building, utilities, phone, business office and central administration. All the rest went for school districts' support—and practically all was for multi-district, or shared programs.

Most of the programs administered by Region XIX ESC are directed toward instructional support. Several examples will illustrate these efforts.

Instructional Media

One of the original purposes for which ESCs were established was to provide educational media to school districts. Media Services offered include production and duplication of transparencies, audio

and video tape production and duplication, lamination of materials, instructional aid production, photography and cooperative purchasing, as well as the maintenance of a 16mm film library of over 8,000 films valued at over $2.5 million. Teachers' use of this library during the 1981-82 school year resulted in 229,619 showings at an average cost of 57¢ per showing. Included in the 57¢ per showing is the cost of film storage, cleaning, and maintenance, and replacement of damaged footage and delivery to and from each school building served. The provision of media service is perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of shared services resulting in economy (or cost-effectiveness), convenience and availability of service, and equalizing educational opportunity.

The turn-down rate for film requests last year was about 11%. In other words, teachers receive the film requested on the day needed 89% of the time. Teachers in most of the school districts use from 60% to 90% of the titles on hand. Therefore, if the regional library did not exist, each school district would need to purchase and service film libraries approaching the cost of the regional library in order to provide the same level of service to their teachers.

The alternative to owning a film library would be to rent films from another source. We conducted a study a few months ago and discovered that the cost of rental of most films would be prohibitive for most districts. A typical popular 26-minute color film is "Donald in Mathmagicland." The cost for renting this film from BYU is $30; Iowa State $12.30; U of Cal. $26.00; U of Wisc.$19; and from Twyman Films, Inc. of Dayton, Ohio, $30. The film must be returned the first working day following screening, and postage both ways must be paid. This film, if ordered from the regional film library, would be delivered and picked up for an average cost of 57¢ per showing. Quite a dramatic example, I'd say, of the case for school districts sharing resources!

Cooperative Purchasing

A basic principle of economy is volume-purchasing. One brief example will illustrate how this program saves school districts money. We received a bid for 25,000 reams of xerographic and mineograph paper for delivery on August 6, 1982. The cost of this paper was 28% below the lowest price we could locate for a small order placed

on July 23, 1982. Other commodities can be—and are—purchased on a cooperative basis which results in volume-purchases at as great or greater savings to school districts.

Special Education

Serving the needs of handicapped children has become one of the most complex responsibilities of education. I am not going to debate whether or not we're doing enough or too much for the handicapped. I would just like for you to keep in mind what you already know: federal, state and local requirements, and various court decisions have established standards and program minimums that are next to impossible for a small school to meet. As a matter of fact, the Texas State Board of Education adopted a rule that schools with less than 3,000 students in average daily attendance, if they want to operate an independent special education program, must present convincing evidence that they have the capability of operating a full special education program. Otherwise they must join together in cooperatives to provide at least a 3000-student base.

Staff recruitment and development, learning disability diagnosis,

provision of related services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy, parent training, and curriculum development are some of the elements of special education programs for which shared resources are necessary.

Even large schools have found that it is necessary to share the talents of such specialized personnel as psychiatrists and teachers of deaf, blind, and deaf/blind students. Our Center provides direct service, direction service, and data management services to each school district in the region.

Staff Development

Perhaps the most obvious need in public education today is more fully qualified staff members. I doubt that we'll ever obtain a full staff of fully qualified staff members—but that, nevertheless, should be the goal of every school board.

How does a school district address this need? Certainly by recruiting the best qualified persons available is a first step but, beyond that, the school district must have a plan for the development of the talents of the people who are working for the school. And

every staff member is a candidate for such development.

In larger schools with several persons in each job assignment, a staff development program can perhaps be successfully implemented, but in smaller schools the job is much more difficult. For instance, most small schools will have only one high school principal and one or two elementary schools. Some may have a junior high. Small schools may have only one chemistry teacher and one math teacher in the high school. The superintendent of a small school rarely has the staff flexibility to employ a person to organize and implement staff development programs so he has to handle this program in addition to business affairs, transportation, cafeterias, building maintenance, and curriculum development.

The answer, of course, is for the school district to join with other districts and organize cooperative staff development programs. According to reports submitted to the Texas Education Agency, during the 1980-81 school year, the Education Service Centers of Texas conducted workshops for approximately 100,000 teachers and administrators. Although some teachers and administrators were counted in more than one

workshop, well over one-half of the teachers and administrators in the State attended at least one staff development activity conducted on a shared-service basis.

An additional problem for small school administrators is staying current in staff development practices and instructional strategies. The October 1982 issue of "Educational Leadership," the Journal of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, focuses upon staff development and inservice education. At least 18 teaching or staff development strategies including "Synectics," "Research-Based Workshops," "CBAM," and "RPTIM" are introduced.

All of these strategies and models, of course, have relevance for the development and implementation of staff development programs. But, again, school districts, especially small districts, very rarely are able to devote the time to analyze each model, determine propriety for their school, and apply it to their system. By coordinating and cooperating with other schools, current theory and practice can be identified, analyzed, and appropriately implemented to strengthen school programs.

Although these four examples of benefits schools can derive from sharing resources are convincing, some school boards and school officials may still ask, "how can I know when my school can profit by sharing resources?". A report by PREP (Putting Research into Practice) suggests that school districts can make this determination by asking themselves these questions:

1. Do our teachers need opportunities to learn new teaching methods?

2. Would our school like to offer more vocational experiences for students?

3. Does our school need qualified counselors or specialists or does our school need to help our counselors and specialists update their knowledge?

4. Do our teachers need more audiovisual materials for their classrooms?

5. Does the cost of our teacher recruitment need to be reduced?

6. Is our school unable to offer students the opportunity to take two or three years of science, foreign language, or mathematics?

7. Is our school unable to provide special programs for gifted and handicapped students?

Where the response to any of these questions is "yes," PREP says that sharing service may be the answer.

The list of activities which may be considered in establishing joint efforts is endless but I would like to list just a few for you to consider. In addition to the areas previously discussed, these might be considered:

- Bus driver training
- Office machines and audiovisual equipment repairs
- Basic skill consultants
- Cooperative scarce-skill teachers such as math and science
- Innovative program pilots
- Driver education
- Professional library
- Migrant programs
- Printing
- Nutrition education
- Cooperative nurses, librarians, and other support personnel
- Bus transportation
- Data Processing

An even more intriguing—and practical—possibility for small schools is the implementation of alternative instructional strategies. No educator interested in students would deny that every student should have the opportunity to take physics or chemistry, or a foreign language, even though only a very few students have this desire. Most small schools cannot locate nor attract fully qualified teachers in these areas. Moreover, if they could locate such teachers, very few would be satisfied to teach other subjects for most of the school day. However, if two, three, or four schools had the same demands, they could, by consolidating and organizing resources, utilize itinerant professional staff, computer assistance, video and other electronics and teaching assistants to offer a quality program.

The scope of programs and services available to all school districts by prudent utilization of cooperative strategies is limited only by the ingenuity and energy of education leaders. I challenge you to join me and others in aggressively pursuing such strategies.

(NOTE: Commissioner of Education's statement—Head of UT Physics Dept. said last year only 126 graduates certified in Physics in the U.S.)